American society, politics, and culture have undergone remarkable change in the past half-century, but many issues have proved to be remarkably durable. This course analyzes some of the major trends in recent American history, as well as addressing conflicting interpretations about the meaning of that history. While this course may help explain contemporary America, it is also an exercise in historical understanding apart from present concerns. This fall I devote more attention than usual to electoral politics and presidential administrations, since we are in the midst of an exceptionally interesting presidential campaign. In most classes before the election, we’ll spend some time analyzing current political developments. Some additional reading may be assigned to keep abreast of electoral developments in historical perspective.

The class is a mixture of lecture and discussion. Participation in class discussions, based on thoughtful consideration of the readings and the issues, is expected. Class participation may be helpful in resolving borderline grades.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There are three writing assignments. The first two are synthetic essays of five or six pages in which you analyze and develop an argument about a specific topic (I’ll give you
suggested topics). The final essay (six to eight pages) will ask you to interpret a broader theme running throughout the course. Each essay counts one-third of the final grade.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

**Paul Boyer**, *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II.*


**Anne Moody**, *Coming of Age in Mississippi.*

**James S. Olson and Randy Roberts**, *Where the Domino Fell: The United States and Vietnam.*


An additional book, dealing with very recent history, may be assigned.

All other readings are on ERES. They are an integral part of the class.

**SCHEDULE**

**9/2**
INTRODUCTION: THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD IN 1960; INTERPRETATIONS OF RECENT AMERICA

Skim Boyer, chaps. 1-5

**9/3 8 P.M.**
JOHNETTA COLE CONVOCATION (FINNEY)

[Highly recommended]

**9/4**
SCREENING OF “DOCTOR STRANGELOVE” (1963)

**9/9**
THE KENNEDY MYSTIQUE

Boyer, chaps. 6-7

**9/11**
COLD WAR AND CUBA
9/16, 9/18  THE BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT
Moody, all; Boyer, chap. 9

9/23  LYNDON JOHNSON AND LIBERALISM AT HIGH TIDE
Boyer, review chap. 7

9/24 8 P.M.  NEWT GINGRICH CONVOCATION (FINNEY)

9/25 8 P.M.  MARC MORIAL CONVOCATION (FINNEY)
[Both highly recommended]

9/25, 9/30  THE SIXTIES: “LIKE A SPACESHIP”
Boyer, chap. 9
Todd Gitlin, The Whole World Is Watching, selections

10/2  THE QUEER LIBERATION MOVEMENT
Readings to be announced

10/7  GAY ARTISTS IN POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICA
Special visit by Michael Sherry, professor of history at Northwestern

10/9  NO CLASS – YOM KIPPUR

10/10  FIRST ESSAY DUE AT 5 P.M.

10/14, 10/16  VIETNAM
Olson and Roberts, all
Gunter Lewy, America in Vietnam, selections
Christian Appy, Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam, selections
Larry Berman, No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and The Betrayal of Vietnam, selections
Michael Lind, Vietnam: The Necessary War, selections

10/21, 10/23  NO CLASS – FALL BREAK
10/28, 10/30 ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT: THE FIRST OIL CRISIS
   Merrill, all

11/4 THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT
   Rosen, all

11/6 POSTMORTEM ON THE ELECTION: WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT LIES AHEAD

11/11, 11/13 REAGAN, THE RIGHT, AND RELIGION
   Boyer, chap. 14

11/18 SECOND ESSAY DUE AT CLASS TIME

11/18, 11/20 BILL CLINTON: LIBERALISM LITE?
   Boyer, chap. 14

11/25 MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART (Special visit to the Allen Memorial Art Museum)

11/27 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

12/2, 12/4 GEORGE W. BUSH AND IRAQ, ABROAD AND AT HOME
   Readings to be announced

12/9 INTERPRETATIONS OF RECENT AMERICAN HISTORY

12/11 TODAY’S CHALLENGES: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

FINAL ESSAY DUE ON DATE TO BE DETERMINED